

Environment Canada said to be cutting 600 positions

By David Israelson Toronto Star

Environment Canada is planning to chop its budget, eliminate about 600 full-time jobs and tighten its control over the flow of information on pollution, The Star has learned.

The moves — a 6 per cent budget cut spread over five years and an extensive departmental reorganization — appear partly designed to trim fat and make operations more efficient.

But the overhaul, confirmed by a senior ministry official, is bound to anger environmental groups and others worried about pollution.

"I didn't know there was anything left to cut," Adele Hurley of the Canadian Coalition on Acid Rain commented.

□ Dioxin in U.S. Niagara dump far over 'danger level.' Page A2

Environment Canada was hit with a \$46 million reduction in its \$700 million-plus annual budget in the Progressive Conservative government's November, 1984, Economic Statement.

But other federal departments, such as defence and external affairs, have had their budgets increased.

The reasons for the latest cut-backs apparently go beyond simple cost-cutting.

Sources said Environment Minister Tom McMillan's senior advisers want to ensure that officials answering questions about pollution problems get their marching orders from Ottawa and nowhere else.

So senior officials plan to pare down or reorganize the department's five regional offices — in Toronto, Halifax, Quebec city, Edmonton and Vancouver. The total staff of about 150 — who work on regional issues and field citizens' questions — could be reduced by as much as a third.

The official explanation for the See OTTAWA/page A8

Bring back Suzanne?

Like many other critics, we applauded when the dreadful Suzanne Blais-Grenier was dumped as federal environment minister last summer and replaced by Tom McMillan, a Prince Edward Island MP. He seemed to combine both political ability and a concern for the environment, two qualities his predecessor lacked. But now McMillan is threatening to make Blais-Grenier look good.

As The Star's David Israelson reported last week, the environment department under McMillan is continuing the cut-backs begun under Blais-Grenier. McMillan may, of course, have argued against these cuts and lost at cabinet.

Less easy for McMillan to explain away, however, is his gagging of officials in his department, notably those in the highly regarded Toronto office, who have in the past communicated openly with the press and public about environmental issues. Apparently what they had to say was not always convenient for the minister. Accordingly, they have now been discouraged from talking to the media without first getting clearance from head office in Ottawa. "It has happened at times that people who were knowledgeable were not necessarily the best (our emphasis) people to answer questions," said Antoine Normand, the department's communications director.

Best for whom? For Canadians, or for the minister?

THE TORONTO STAR, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 1986 ★

Ottawa said axing environment jobs

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aching is that it is a response to the Minister Brian Mulroney's commitment to trim civil service and to a task force led by Deputy Prime Minister Nielsen, which is looking at ways to slash government waste.

Sources cited another reason for the moves: McMillan and his advisers became angry last fall at the way regional offices handled information about toxic chemicals, especially the toxic St. Lawrence "blob," near Sarnia.

It was felt that statements by regional officials and their background about the blob and about local pollution in food and water tripped up the minister when he made statements of his

source said McMillan storm-

ed out of a meeting that included regional officials last fall and vowed to "string them up..."

Robert Slater, the ministry's assistant deputy minister in charge of policy, called the planned reductions simply a matter of streamlining operations.

He confirmed in an interview that the department intends to cut its budget by about 6 per cent and that some 600 full-time jobs will be phased out of its 10,000-member work force.

Antoine Normand, Environment Canada's communications director, acknowledged that Ottawa is concerned about data that has been getting out.

"It has happened at times that people who were knowledgeable were not necessarily the best people to answer questions," he said.

McMillan's advisers were also concerned about reports — also coming from the Toronto office — that toxic substances like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) have become so widespread that they are appearing in food and human tissue.

In November, Environment Canada published a pamphlet called *Storm Warning*, which said that:

□ "Chemical substances such as PCBs and DDT (a toxic insecticide) have been found in mother's milk and are passed along to nursing babies."

□ "Toxic chemicals are found in the body tissue of individuals who eat little or no Great Lakes fish."

□ The Great Lakes area is being subjected to "PCB fallout" — in other words, toxic substances are

reaching us through the air.

The pamphlet was withdrawn 10 days after its release. At the time, Ottawa's explanation was that a top department official wanted to review the material.

Normand now maintains *Storm Warning* was withdrawn because its layout did not meet government guidelines. "It had nothing to do with content and everything to do with presentation."

Asked if the booklet will be re-released with its presentation corrected, he suggested that was doubtful, due to budgetary constraints.

Less than two weeks after *Storm Warning* was taken out of circulation, a joint Canadian-United States scientific team released a report saying many of the same things the pamphlet said.